


# Menominee Nation News



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## Feds admits setbacks in fixing \$5M Indian trust

By MATT KELLEY  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Interior Department has admitted drastic setbacks in its plans to fix mismanagement of a \$500 million trust system for American Indians, meaning years of more financial uncertainty for some 300,000 account holders, many of them poor.

"We're left once again with the feeling of empty promises," Keith Harper, a Cherokee lawyer representing account holders, said Thursday.

The Interior Department revealed the problems Wednesday in its first progress report to a federal judge. U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth ordered the reports in a December ruling that gave the federal government *one last opportunity* to correct more than a century of mismanagement of the trust funds.

The report said a \$60 million computer system to track account information has run into such severe development problems that the government no longer has a schedule to have it up and running nationwide. Original plans had called for the Trust Asset and Accounting Management System, or TAAMS, to

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## Propane Emergency Training Held



B. Miller/MNN

### Hazardous Materials emergency response training

Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, the Tribe held a training session for emergency responders to battle propane accidents. The training was part of a comprehensive program for responders to combat chemical accidents under a Department of Transportation grant entitled Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness. The Environmental Services

Department manages the grant and program. The instructor of the classes was Terry Linson of Fox Valley Technical College.

## Multiracial heritage raises fine points in filling out Census 2000

By First Nations Development  
Institute and Yvonne M. Kaquatosh  
Menominee Nation News

A member of the National American Indian 2000 Census Advisory Committee warns that Indian communities could be under counted in Census 2000 if American Indians aren't careful about how they fill out the census forms.

Glenda Abhaity said that if American Indians of multiple racial heritage check more than one race (i.e., American Indian and white, black, or Asian) on the Census 2000 form, they will be tabulated in the multiracial category for much of the census reporting that has economic consequences. Their information will eventually appear in American Indian aggregate statistics, but at deeper cuts of the data. For instance,

they may not factor as American Indians in the crucial "percent living in poverty" figures that form the baseline for funding various programs.

The same holds true if a Native American is living in a household where the head of the household filling out the form is non-Indian — all members of the household are tabulated as *non-Indian* in the most economically consequential data cuts.

Because many issues regarding tabulation may not be resolved until after April, when Census 2000 officially commences, anyone expecting to be counted as an American Indian or Native American in Census 2000 should follow two simple guidelines, Ms. Abhaity said:

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be available nationwide by year's end. Projects to collect all of the records related to the accounts and check their accuracy also have run into roadblocks and will not be finished until 2003, and efforts to draft policies and procedures for handling the trust system will not be done until 2004, the report said.

A group of Indians sued the federal government in 1996 over the mismanagement of their accounts, which hold the proceeds of leases for grazing, logging or oil drilling on Indian land. The government has admitted that record-keeping is so poor that it does not know for sure how much money should be in each account and does not have current addresses for more than 46,000 account holders.

Lamberth held Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, Bureau of Indian Affairs head Kevin Gover and then-Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers in contempt of court last year for failing to turn over documents.

Months later, an investigator hired by Lamberth found trust documents piled in a garbage heap on a North Dakota reservation and said Treasury officials had kept quiet for months about the inadvertent destruction of other trust documents.

Harper said the problems outlined in the latest report mean that account holders face "continued uncertainty about whether they're getting the right amount. They're going to continue to lose money with a broken system."

Rex Hackler, a spokesman for Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs, did not return telephone calls seeking comment Thursday. Babbitt and Gover have repeatedly said that fixing the trust fund problems is their top priority.

President Clinton's 2001 budget proposal includes \$58.4 million for that work, down from \$76.6 million this year. Gover has said this year's spending is higher because of plans to buy equipment such as computers that will be used for several years.

Gover also has repeatedly insisted that the TAAMS computer system was on schedule and working. He told a January meeting of the United South and Eastern Tribes that TAAMS "is probably the best land management system in the world. That's probably a little puffery, but that's what we've told."

But a new version of Interior's plan to fix the problems said TAAMS has been plagued by setbacks and is far behind its original schedule. The main reason: Officials bought the system from a private contractor and began putting data into it before determining what information needed to be in the database and how it would be used.

The Interior Department "in retrospect . . . concedes that the plan was overly optimistic given the complexity of the task at hand," the document said.

Congress' General Accounting Office warned Interior of precisely that problem last year, but at the time BIA officials dismissed the criticism.

Harper said he and other lawyers representing the Indians would investigate whether Interior Department officials misled Lamberth about such problems during a trial in the case last summer.

"The court said they had one last chance," Harper said. "This is just not good enough. A high-level implementation plan with the majority of the dates three years from now . . . is just not acceptable."

## CENSUS:

1. Check 'No' on the Hispanic/Latino origin question.
2. Check only one race - American Indian, and write in the tribal designation.

Ms. Ahhaitty can be reached at [glendas-@aol.com](mailto:glendas-@aol.com). Additional information, including contact information for other members of the National American Indian 2000 Census Advisory Committee, can be found at the US Census Bureau website, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) or at the Native American Public Telecommunications website, [www.nativetelecom.org](http://www.nativetelecom.org) a US Census Bureau-designated Census Information Center.

To raise community awareness on the importance of filling out the census form, meetings will be held during the week of April 3-7, 2000 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Dinner will be provided.

Tentative meeting dates and locations are as follows: Mon.-Neopit/Zoar at Menominee Tribal School, Tues.-Keshena at High School, Wed.-Middle Village Safety Building, Thurs.-South Branch Community Center.

Native Americans were under counted by approximately 12.2% nationally in 1990 according to census statistics. In relation to other minorities, Native Americans ranked the highest in the undercount. As a result of the inaccuracy of the 1990 census, many communities were shortchanged on federal and state spending for schools, crime prevention, health care, and transportation. This has meant a continuing hardship for state and local officials trying to serve the needs of their communities because millions of dollars are incorrectly distributed each year based on inaccurate population figures.

For example, state and federal aids that the Menominee Indian School District receives is just over

\$12-million (\$12,204,000) or 63% of the total budget of \$18,992,000. The allocation is based upon population counts via the census. It was estimated that Menominees were under counted by 404 in 1990 according to a statistical analysis that was compiled by Community Development.